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MACREADY AS I KNEW HIM.



# MACREADY AS I KNEW HIM.

BY  
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To

MY SON WALTER.





## KATE MACREADY TO HER FATHER.

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FOR ever loved, revered—my heart's first friend,  
Tender as love itself, and true as truth,  
I would that men might see thee with my eyes,  
Know thee as I have known—then should fame's  
wreath  
(Bound on thy brows of yore) new semblance take  
And show thee halo'd with celestial light !  
Yet I who know thee best, and have enshrined  
Thy virtues in my soul, shall feeblest prove  
To speak how dear thy worth ! That which has been  
Most noble in thee never can be known.  
O loving lips, long silent in the grave,  
Could but the old life warm them for a space,  
How would they echo now my poor applause !  
And oh, if this adventurous pen can boast  
The transcript of one pure intent, true thought  
Or generous aspiration, unto thee  
Alone be praise ! All good my life can show  
Is of thy teaching, and in offering thee  
This lowly tribute of my grateful love,  
God knows I give thee but thine own again !

*Dedication of "Leaves from the Olive Mount."*



## MACREADY AS I KNEW HIM.



MACREADY, the famous tragedian, was an exceptional man, and one of the most interesting I have ever come across. The enthusiasm which the passion and poetry of his acting excited suffered no diminution by personal acquaintance. His thought went deep; he was imaginative; he was humorous, and he had an uncommon amount of sensibility combined with a constant urgent desire to be good and to do good. This very desire, at war perhaps with the circumstances of his professional life, fretted him inwardly and irritated a

temper, the violence of which was his only inheritance from his father.

It was not often, however, that he was angry with his friends ; he was habitually courteous, and the touch of haughtiness which was felt in his bearing and in his first manner gave a particular charm, by contrast to the tenderness and to the unreserve of his domestic intercourse. No man could say so kindly a kind thing, no man could do a graceful act with more grace, and no man could be a better friend. I remember vividly, as if it had happened only yesterday, the manner in which my husband and myself made his acquaintance.

We had just witnessed the performance of the 'Jealous Wife,' in which his Mr. Oakley was a masterpiece of comedy acting, and we adjourned from the theatre to the house of Mr. Justice Talfourd, where a large party was assembled. In

the entrance hall I saw a gentleman, whose demeanour I well knew, taking off his outer coat ; his back was turned to me, but when the servant took his coat from him, he faced me, and I, thinking of nothing but the play, exclaimed, ‘ Oh, Mr. Oakley ! ’ He smiled at first, and then laughed outright. I apologized, and my husband, who had met him once before, made haste to introduce me : we shook hands, and that evening the foundation of a friendship was laid which went on without an hour of interruption till Macready disappeared from this world, and which was of such strong fibre as death itself cannot alter.

The performance of Mr. Oakley was one of a series of farewell representations immediately preceding Macready’s final departure from the stage, and before we parted that night he invited us to pay him a visit in his retirement at Sherborne—an

invitation which we gladly accepted. It was in June, 1851, that we first passed a week in Macready's home, where we stayed again with him on several subsequent occasions. I kept notes of many of our conversations, and of such incidents as arose at each of these periods; but it is not my intention now to write a chronicle. I shall simply endeavour to convey to others the impression that our tragedian made upon me, giving a few records of his talk, of his opinions, and of his domestic ways. For in his own diaries he has not rendered the charming, the tender side of his nature—he has rather, in writing them, found a vent for painful thoughts—nor has he sufficiently dwelt upon his fine interpretations of great poetry. He was an essentially imaginative man: look at the portraits of him—at the wide brow, the sensitive mouth—and you will not doubt it. Look again at the strong jaw, and

you will see the force which kept that fervent imagination in check. Thorburn has truly rendered all the characteristics of the man for those who know how to read them.

He speaks in his diary of the ugliness which went against him at his first appearance. Perhaps in his youth he was somewhat puffy—I have heard so—but when I first saw him in his middle age, his face and figure showed little flesh, his jaw was square, there was a singular intensity in his eyes, he looked like a passionate thinking man, and his presence was commanding; you would hardly pass him in the street without saying, ‘Who can that be?’ His first aspect was perhaps severe, but what a charm there is in a grave countenance when it breaks into a pleasant smile—a smile of humour or of kindness.

Macready was born in 1793, when the eighteenth century was approaching its

death ; yet he seemed to belong to it ; his character, his thoughts, his literary taste, and his religious aspirations even, bore the stamp of it ; he had its deliberation, its habit of meditation and its decorum. Perhaps the reading of his youth led him that way ; however that may be, certain it is that he was by many of his qualities an eighteenth century man. And this was apparent in the training of his children, whom he loved with all his large capacity for love, but with whom he insisted upon such an amount of discipline as was really out of date. He took too prominent a part in their teaching. Parents should be as abstemious in educating their children as doctors are in dosing them, for after a long lesson both parties are wont to be fretted ; a child loses the pleasure of his father's tenderness if he looks upon him as a schoolmaster, and a father forfeits the charm of childish talk when in his boy he



sees a dunce. Accordingly, between Macready and his elder sons there was much affection, but there was also much restraint. This was not the case with the daughters, whose teaching, except in the matter of elocution, was consigned to their aunt and mother, and who would play about him like little kittens.

When we first visited Macready at Sherborne, he had recently lost his eldest daughter, Nina, and had suffered as a strong man suffers; but he had a complete certainty within himself that after his own death he should be with her again, and the intensity of this faith in him was his support, when one by one his treasures dropped away from him, till out of nine only three were left. One of these, Cecilia Benvenuta, was a source to him of unspeakable delight. She was a pretty child, with high animal spirits, and a loving nature which showed itself in quaint

devices of caressing words, and in all sorts of funny tricks. She would frequently call her father her 'life' and her 'joy,' and would devise all sorts of new endearing epithets for him.

When he walked and talked in the garden, he was constantly impeded by this little girl and her sister Lily, clinging round his legs; or when he read, she would steal behind him, and suddenly blind him with her hands, or she would hang upon his neck till he was half strangled; but his eyes glistened with tenderness, and his remonstrances were too faint to be heard. On one occasion, when she was more turbulent than usual, he said aside to a friend, 'How I love her high spirit! it is health—it is health—it is health!'

The garden, small but sheltered, was Macready's favourite resort; and he never talked more pleasantly than when he

paced it up and down : perhaps the exercise stimulated him, and the open air took off all sense of restraint. The conversations I have recorded mostly took place either in this garden or in the library, the cosiest room in the house. Some of these, especially when touching on dramatic subjects, will I hope retain an interest for the readers of to-day.

Speaking of Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Noble Kinsmen,' Macready said that it contained many beautiful passages, the finest of which occurred in the earlier scenes ; but that the beauty was marred by the evidence of over-labour, with many images requiring science to understand them, when they ought to be clear to passion. He felt a want of life in Beaumont and Fletcher, an artificial condition, an absence of true humanity, which was most evident when contrasted with the vitality of Shakespeare.

He regarded 'Romeo and Juliet' as the most essentially poetical of the Shakespearian plays, and the character of Juliet as the very perfection of dramatic power. Desdemona he held to be an equally beautiful conception of an opposite type.

In a talk about 'Hamlet,' touching upon the character of Polonius, he said he thought it a mistake to view his whole conduct as a plot to get his daughter married to the Prince. He was a well-intentioned man, with some knowledge of the world, but with waning faculties ; and he honestly believed Ophelia to be the sole cause of Hamlet's lunacy. Nor would Macready admit Hamlet's love for Ophelia to be a light thing. Hamlet's passionate temperament would not admit of a little love—he would love much, or not at all ; but the supernatural appearance of his father's spirit, and the nature of his revelations, so upset his whole state of man

that previous impressions were effaced. Such a condition was a necessary consequence of the circumstances; it could not be otherwise.

He himself, when a very young man, once in a dream saw and heard definitely and distinctly a friend lately dead, who came to address to him words of admonition. He woke in extraordinary emotion, and the image of this man filled his mind for long afterwards. Whenever he was to act Hamlet, he summoned up the passion of that dream.

Being asked if he liked acting Romeo, and being told of the recollection of his performance of this character still retained with delight by a lady who had seen it, on an occasion when he filled the part because Charles Kemble was ill, he replied that he well remembered that night. He had a great success, and when the play was over, Miss O'Neill expressed to him her hope

that he would be called upon to repeat the character, because his passion was an immense help to her.

Mr. Harris, then manager, was a man always fair in his dealings, and accordingly he put this young tragedian up for the next representation; but by a strange fatality he caught a cold so violent on the day fixed for the performance, that his appearance before the public was a literal impossibility, and he could only lie on his bed prostrated by fever in a state of great discomfiture, both physical and mental, while Charles Kemble was again playing Romeo.

Undoubtedly this was a great opportunity lost for his professional advancement. An actor's life, said Macready, was full of strange checks, struggles, and disappointments; but some of them had their whimsical side. At Kendal he was once induced to act in a wretched theatre, being deceived as to its condition. When he

arrived, he found all the appointments execrable. At the rehearsal of the play of 'Virginus,' he remonstrated upon the indecorous manner in which the body of Dentatus was flung down upon the bare boards, and he was promised that it should be 'all right at performance.' But when the night came, looking from the wings upon the stage as he was about to make his entrance, he perceived that there were only two men on the scene for the bearing-off of the body, which was by no means a light one.

'Impossible!' he said; 'I cannot go on. Two men cannot manage it; the thing will be ridiculous; they will break down. I *will* not go on!'

'Oh, sir! pray, sir! indeed, sir, it has been rehearsed. Really, sir, they do it perfectly.'

With this he went on. He acted his best, and wrung from his audience many

tears ; but when it was time to remove the corpse, he saw, to his dismay, the two men set it upon its feet, and hitching it up between them under each arm, walk off with it, body erect and eyes shut, at a slow march. On this tears of sympathy turned to tears of laughter, and the house was in an uproar of merriment. The spell by which to calm down an audience in such a critical condition was a silent, steady, earnest look : he had never known it to fail.

On another occasion, at Scarborough, as he passed off the stage to his dressing-room he stumbled over a human figure extended on the floor. It was the lessee. Presently the acting-manager, appearing, to settle accounts, apologized for the principal with these words : You see, sir, you must excuse him—parting with friends to-day—a little wine ; in truth, sir, he is *rather fresh*. When Macready recounted this



anecdote he repeated the words 'rather fresh' with a humorous emphasis, followed by a low laugh of enjoyment, which was so full of the sense of fun that it tickled every hearer, and caught first one, then the other, till the table was in a roar.

Macready used to travel in his own carriage through the provinces, his friend Sheil and also Miss O'Neill having advised him to do this even in his early days; for said they, a manager incapable of being impressed by genius may be impressed by a carriage. He found this to be strictly true, and the carriage was a good investment. Personally, also, it proved a pleasure as well as an advantage to him. Cast among strange people and strange places, his only feeling of home was in this carriage. It was filled with books; he got through interesting reading on the road, and enjoyed much delicious country. But everything was different now; you could

no longer linger and love ; you could only rush on in a whirl of noise and grime. He vividly remembered a journey he made from Birmingham to London by coach in order to see the great Catalani. ‘This journey,’ said he, ‘took twenty-six hours, and when at last I did reach London I was doomed to disappointment. Madame Catalani was ill, and could not perform. It was a heavy blow ; but when I called at her house to inquire after her, she sent me down a message to go up to see her, and I was ushered into her bedroom where she was in bed. “ Oh ! ” said she, pressing my hand between both hers, “ I am so sorry for you ; I do so much like you ! ” All this with a simplicity, a grace, a dignity, that I can never forget. Catalani was very great, and enthusiasm for her ran higher even than that you have witnessed in these days for Jenny Lind.’

Being asked if he shared the general

adoration for Jenny Lind, Macready replied : ‘ Yes, with all my heart. As an artist she is perfect, inestimable ; as a woman she is charming and noble. She dwells upon a hill apart ; she is quite exceptional. My daughter Nina loved her. Oh, how much she loved her !’

Here there was a pause, for Macready could never name the child he had lost without emotion.

Presently, however, the conversation again turned upon his provincial experiences, and he told how, as he was sitting writing in the public room at an inn in Cheltenham, he overheard the ludicrous talk of two tipsy gentlemen seated at another table.

‘ *1st Gent.* “ Do you like Exeter ?”

‘ *2nd Gent.* “ Pretty well ; but nothing to Bath. Bath’s really nice—no acrimony at Bath—a good deal of friendship at Bath.”

‘ *1st Gent.* “ Ah ! oh ! ah ! that’s very

nice. But now, do tell me, what do you consider friendship ?”

‘*2nd Gent.* “Well, you see there’s no acrimony at Bath ; and as for friendship, why, I’ll tell you what, I don’t call it friendship when a fellow doesn’t care a damn for you.”’

Bath was a favourite resort of Macready’s youth. He recalled the time of its gay fashion, its rotation of diversion, when each day had its special entertainment. There was the day for the theatre, the day for the ball, the day for the masquerade, and the day for the chapel ; and every day the streets were so crowded that it was difficult to make your way through them. And now what a change ! What a desert the place appeared ! A visit to Bath had become the most melancholy of all sensations.

Among the many strange characters that Macready fell in with during his

provincial engagements, there was a country manager who was always ready at a moment's notice to undertake the part of any actor who failed him.

On one occasion, when the 'Castle Spectre' was about to be played, there was no Angelo forthcoming.

'I'll do it myself,' said this daring manager.

'But, sir, do you know the words?'

'No, I don't; but never mind, tell me the situation, and I'll supply the dialogue.'

'Well, sir, Angelo has been unjustly imprisoned; he comes out from his dungeon weary and emaciated——'

'Enough! enough!' said the manager; and he went on and declaimed these words: 'Alas! worn with travel, faint with long confinement, cruelly imprisoned for sixteen years, and during that long and bitter period having tasted no food——'

Loud and prolonged laughter was the answer of the audience to his speech, with ironical cheering.

Sometimes Macready emerged from his garden into the country lanes and fields, and I walked beside him, while the children stopped here and there to gather wild-flowers. As we were lingering and loitering in this way one sunny day through a green meadow, silently enjoying the beauty of the country, a flock of startled sheep scrambled over the hedge that skirted the meadow, and the leader's bell tinkling with its delicate tender tone pleasantly broke the silence.

'Listen to that sound,' said Macready; 'isn't it delicious? I introduced it in "As You Like It." Ah! that was my favourite production; it was a beautiful pastoral, and every minor part was well filled. I gave Le Beau to Hudson. He came into my room, book in hand.

““ You need not speak, Mr. Hudson,” I said, “for I know what you are going to say ; your part is too insignificant.”

““ Yes, sir, it is ; indeed it is.”

““ Hush, sir ! allow me to read it to you.”

‘ Before the reading was concluded, Hudson was in convulsions of laughter, and delighted to take the character.

““ Excellent, sir ! excellent !” he said. “I had no idea of what it was.”

‘ He gained great and deserved applause in it, with a merry response from the audience while he spoke the words.

‘ I put a Harlequin into the part of the wrestler, and he was actually frightened almost to the point of faintness at the sound of the applause he brought down.

‘ The only shortcoming in the whole performance was the Rosalind of Mrs. Nisbett, a very charming actress in many characters, but not equal’ to that. She

was not disagreeable, but she was inadequate.'

Macready spoke of the alterations of this beautiful play for the stage as among the most absurd of the many ridiculous ones in vogue before his time; he did away with this trash, and restored the original text.

Could anything be more preposterous than the handing over of the first lord's speech to Jacques in order to enrich his part? which obliged the Duke to say to Jacques, 'Did *you* not moralize this spectacle?' and Jacques to reply, 'Oh yes, my lord; into a thousand similes.' It was *surpassingly ludicrous*. In his youth Macready was brought up to believe that Shakespeare was not dramatic, but serious study soon overturned this bad teaching, and he boldly renounced the false faith and all its priests. On one occasion, remonstrating with a manager upon Tate's



garbling of 'King Lear,' and drawing his attention to a passage in which one says that he should like *to tear out the bowels of another and twist them round his arm*, the manager replied that if that passage did seem a little faulty, there were splendid ones to atone for it, as, for instance, the lines describing the wind with rosy wings; he held this idea to be so exquisite, as far to exceed any poetry of Shakespeare's, upon which Macready took up his hat and said 'Good-morning!'

Macready attended with great delight Coleridge's 'Lectures on Shakespeare.' 'They were,' he said, 'eloquent and impressive, only too discursive; an hour to an Act.' He recalled a striking expression of Coleridge's, in condemning passages of revolting horror as alien from true art; he said it was '*a descent from the heart to the stomach.*' Macready cited some modern French plays as examples of

this fault. He felt it especially in Victor Hugo's 'Le Roi s'amuse.' It existed also, in a lesser degree, in his play of 'Hernani,' of which a weak adaptation for the English stage was made under the title of 'The Pledge, or Castilian Honour.' This 'Pledge' was so poor a thing, that when Macready was offered his choice of parts in it, he chose the shortest. Victor Hugo was a man of vast genius, but he could not think him a man of dramatic genius.

From Victor Hugo and French poetry he passed on to German poets, and dwelt long on Schiller's tragedy of 'Wallenstein,' which he admired for some transcendent merits. 'It was,' he said, 'a great dramatic history; but it was deficient in the highest poetic power, that of condensation. Everything in it was too long: it was remarkable for its distinct drawing of individual character; and the scenes be-

tween Thekla and Max were full of tender beauty. Macready had made an adaptation of this play for his own stage ; but before it could be brought out, his management broke up, and he could not trust the production of it to any other director.

At my particular request, Macready read aloud to me some scenes from this adaptation, and with such effect that I felt the loss of it a serious calamity to the stage. As a tragedian, Macready's ascendancy has been disputed. Has it been otherwise with any great tragic actor *in his own time*? But as a reader, I never heard his rare power challenged : he swayed his hearers according to his will, and his will was that of a perfect artist.

I remember well, in his reading of 'Wallenstein,' with what force he brought out, as an essential element in the play, Wallenstein's dominating superstition —

his belief in the influence of the stars; and with what grandeur — with what majesty he invested it. Undoubtedly one of his greatest characters was lost by the impossibility of producing his adaptation of this drama; and I grieve to say that the MS. from which he read can nowhere be found: the sole record now remaining of its existence is in my notes taken at Sherborne, and they give no extracts. It was probably lost at the time of his moving from Sherborne to Cheltenham.

Macready, though so great a reader, dwelt frequently on the difficulty of reading plays aloud. He did not think that dramatic reading could ever be altogether satisfactory as an art, though with great care and thought it might be made interesting. ‘No change of voice,’ he said, ‘should ever be attempted, it misdirects the attention; only a change of tone, as a softer tone for the woman. It is a labour to sustain passion

through so many varieties, to pass from the opposite passions of one character to another. The acting of a single part is light work compared to that of reading a combination of many parts, and it is attended by more stimulating applause; besides which it has the impulse of the acting of others. In reading, as in acting, intense feeling must move the performer; any interruption that checks the feeling destroys the power.

‘It is the greatest help to have a great actor by your side; it is torture to act against bad acting, to be, as it is said, “ill-supported.” Some acting, however, goes beyond such a phrase as that; it positively beats against you—as in the case of my Philip Van Artevelde, when the Adriana, in her timid confession of love, bellowed it out so that the boards shook with it. Was it not difficult to cherish her for this?’

The feeling of an audience greatly affects and assists an actor ; he knows when his spirits obey ; he feels when he has got his team well in hand. He himself found an immense delight in sympathy ; he was sometimes almost entranced by it. Never more deeply than in the representation of Talfourd's play of ' Ion ' had he been moved by this charm. What an audience he had ! Bulwer, Dickens, Thomas Moore, Samuel Rogers, and a score of other distinguished writers were present ; in fact, all the wits of the day. They seemed to hang upon his every word, to strain for his every look ; and he himself striving to make them feel the poet, felt him doubly again through them. Their enthusiasm begot in him a rapture which was like inspiration : probably his face reflected it, for Sheridan Knowles, visiting him in his dressing-room after the per-

formance, said, ' You looked positively not more than eighteen.'

While Macready told these things all the enthusiasm of his past triumph glowed in his face. Passing on to some general remarks upon acting, he said: ' Miss O'Neill was a great actress, and Rachel is a great actress. Neither could boast an extended range of character—their genius, opposite in kind, is similar in extent—neither deserves comparison with Mrs. Siddons, who had an infinite variety of passion, with a most beautiful person; yet I feel each to be perfect in her own sphere. Miss O'Neill was a remarkable instance of self-abandonment in acting. She forgot everything for the time but her assumed character. She was an entirely modest woman; yet in acting with her I have been nearly smothered by her kisses.'

At this point, Macready was interrupted

by an observation from Mrs. Macready, who said in a deprecating tone :

‘ Oh ! and she was a very handsome woman—William—wasn’t she ?’

Macready spoke of Mrs. Glover as a rare thinking actress. She carefully thought out every part ; she was very perfect ; she had great powers, and had her personal appearance better served her, she might have been a distinguished actress of tragedy as she was of comedy. He had the highest esteem for her.

As we turned over a collection of old playbills, Macready was asked what were the true merits of Junius Booth ? He replied : ‘ Very small. He was not unlike Kean in person ; he thought himself like him in genius. But Kean knew that this was a mistake, and so he took him to Drury Lane, and got him an engagement to play with him in leading characters. A night was fixed for Kean in Othello,



and Booth in Iago. Kean rejoiced, for he knew that he should smash him. That night Campbell (the poet), Thomas Moore, and my brother Edward, were in the house. The acting of Kean, great as it always was in this part, transcended on this occasion all his previous representations; every word seemed an inspiration; he absorbed his audience; he held them breathless; they could not even see his rival. To say that Booth was obscured, was diminished, would not be true—he disappeared; and under the bitter disappointment of that evening's performance he broke his engagement.

‘Kean was the most singular of great actors—so inexpressibly great when successful. He seemed to play by intuition, and if for one instant his inspiration deserted him he never recovered it: one scene lost and he would fail altogether; but when he held a character in his grasp

how beautifully it was given; how unequalled his pathos; how tender, how delicate, how exquisite his elocution! I never shall forget the music of the musical passages of his Richard II., and the sublime melancholy of their delivery; his tones still linger with me in the words—

“O, flattering glass!

Thou dost beguile me. Was this the face  
That every day under his household roof  
Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face  
That like the sun did make beholders wink?”

Being asked if he had known Kean personally, Macready said: ‘Oh yes! but he was shy and constrained with me; and yet I believe that he entertained for me a particular kind of esteem.’

Turning now to a bill which announced Henderson as Falstaff, Macready said: ‘Henderson was a truly great actor. My father at Dublin played Horatio to three Hamlets—J. Kemble’s, Holman’s, and

Henderson's; he told me that Henderson's drew tears from him, and it was said by a critic of that time that Kemble was the Prince, Holman was Hamlet, and Henderson was Hamlet Prince of Denmark.'

'Hamlet was one of my own favourite parts. I feel my best Shakespearian characters to have been Lear, Hamlet, Iago, and Macbeth. I was never quite satisfied with my Othello: one of my highest delights was the playing of Iago to Kean's Othello—the life of my own Iago gained intensity, while that Othello stood living before me in all his noble passion. Iago was a subject of deep study to me, and some men distinguished by their capacity and learning have assured me that they never fully understood the meaning of the character till they saw me act it. Kean was the only instance that I know of an actor who could clutch a character without studying it. Talma had

the passion of Kean, with the accomplishment of Kemble; he was an admirable tragedian. Charles Young had genius, but he neglected it; he was too easily satisfied with applause, and did not aim at the perfection of his art. His Iago was a fine brilliant piece of declamation, but not enough thought had been given to the subtlety of the character; his Zanga in "The Revenge" was excellently spoken, but wanted the fire of the hot Moorish blood. Young's love of society was an interruption to his study; society was his weakness, but he was an actor of great ability and a man of high character.'

Talking of elocution, he said, 'I know none more perfect than that of Miss O'Neill; it was a pleasure to watch the movement of her lips. She was a charming woman. Recently I unexpectedly met her at a great house in Stratton Street. We had not met since the year 1819; and

how strange it was for each to look again upon the other's face. Both now completely withdrawn from our public career, this sudden glimpse vividly brought back the past, the long past! We met with the same cordiality and regard with which we had parted, and we sat together the whole evening. I saw beauty and grace in her still, though I had been told it was all gone.'

A play bill now produced of 'The Merchant of Venice,' led to a discussion of that play. The part of Shylock was not a favourite with Macready: it was, he said, composed of harshness. His lamentation over the loss of the turquoise ring he could not accept as a touch of humanity, as many critics did; no, he did not believe this grief to be due to the associations of early love, but to the particular money-value of the gem. It being remarked by one of the party that Bassanio was immensely selfish

in the sacrifice he accepted from Antonio, Macready warmly defended him, saying :

‘You must remember his critical position ; and the apparent certainty of Antonio’s vast wealth ; for it was divided among such a variety of ships that the loss of the whole seemed a literal impossibility.’

Here the other, shifting the ground, said :

‘Well, Antonio was the better man, at any rate. He, as a friend, was admirable.’

‘I don’t wish,’ replied Macready, ‘to detract in any way from his merits : it *was* very kind of him.’

There was something in the earnestness of tone with which this observation was made which tickled the three bystanders, one of whom was his daughter Katie. Their eyes met, and they burst into a peal of laughter.

Macready looked from one to the other in amazement.

‘I am really quite at a loss,’ he said. ‘Where is the absurdity? What have I done?’

When two or three are once set off in a foolish fit of merriment repression is difficult, and for a minute a distinct answer was really impossible; but presently one, making a successful struggle, replied:

‘You said—you only said he was very kind.’

‘Well, and was he *not* very kind?’

‘Yes — yes; only — only — only you seemed to think he was alive. Oh—oh! indeed you did.’

‘And so he is to me. So are they all. Who is alive if they are not? And that diverts you! Good God!’

The three gradually recovering, some talk ensued as to other characters in the

same play, and Macready said: 'I love Portia—I love her dearly, although she steps over the boundary of feminine reserve, which I most prize in a woman. I hate Jessica—a nasty little devil!'

Being told of a new reading suggested in Shylock's famous upbraiding of Antonio, which altered the pause in the line and made it run thus: 'Many a time, and oft on the Rialto have you rated me.'

Macready protested strongly against it, saying: 'It is an essentially faulty reading. This reader would have it that an insult was greater on the Rialto than elsewhere, because it was there that the merchants congregated; but he should remember that probably Shylock never met Antonio anywhere else, therefore it would be the abuse, not the scene of it, that would sting him. He was upbraiding the Christian with general cruelty and contempt, and the pointing specially to a smaller particular



offence would diminish the force of the passage.'

A new reading in Milton, which came from the same source as that in 'The Merchant of Venice,' equally displeased Macready. It dealt with the celebrated passage, line 3, book ii., of 'Paradise Lost'—

'Or where the gorgeous East, with richest hand,  
Showers on her kings, barbaric pearl and gold'—

and suggested a change in the pause as follows :

'Showers on her kings barbaric, pearl and gold.'

Macready pointed out that in the first place the kings here designated were not barbaric ; and in the next place that such a pause destroyed the music and rhythm of the line, ending it meanly with pearl and gold.

It is, indeed, surprising that a man of ability and literary attainments, such as

the suggester of these readings certainly was, should have entertained, even for a moment, notions so feeble in their novelty.

I have spoken of Macready's reading ; but how is it possible to convey in written words the manner of it ? I can record the impression which it made, I cannot give the why or the how.

Will ever, among the wonders of modern science, an instrument be constructed to repeat perfectly spoken words with the true inflection, the accent, the tone of their utterance ?

When Macready read 'Hamlet' the King became a wholly intelligible personage. He had a courteous dignity, a persuasive manner, and it was pleasant to listen to him ; though at moments a little oiliness of tone imparted to an attentive hearer a touch of suspicion.

This is how it ought to be played ; but unless the part were taken by a first-rate

actor, the honeyed courtesy given by Macready would to a certainty be coarsened till it became conventional low blarney. The other feature in the reading, which exalted the tragedy into something greater than it has ever been in representation, was the supernatural character with which the ghost was invested. He neither growled, nor droned, nor dragged the time, but his tones seemed to come from another world. They were audible, quite audible; but they were without resonance. They seemed to proceed from a being apart, who had seen what we could not see. Instead of the drowsy feeling which creeps over the audience when these scenes are acted, there was an intensity of attention excited which transcended all ordinary human interest, and which grew as the long communication proceeded, rising at last to such awful apprehension, to such an immense pity mixed with fear, that not only the altered

state of Hamlet's nature after this visitation was understood, but it was actually shared for some minutes by the hearers.

I remember that when the reading was concluded, Macready's eldest son, Willie, came to me and said, 'How are you after it? Oh, how that ghost makes me shiver!'

It is possible that some critics may say (if any critics chance to read this narration) that in the acting of the tragedy the ghost so given would assume too much importance, and distract the attention from the principal figure; but such a criticism would surely be false. A ghost as impressive as Macready's throws a stronger light upon Hamlet, and so vivifies our sympathy with his condition that we are prepared for all the fluctuations of his thought, and are ready with him to blow every lighter thing away to the winds, to drift as chance will have it.

The tragedy of 'Romeo and Juliet'

gained not less than Hamlet by Macready's reading; he brought out, more vividly than ever it appeared for me in any performance, the music and the passion of its poetry. This was the case throughout; but his greatest achievement was Juliet's dismal scene alone, where his passion so worked upon the imagination of his hearers that they themselves conceived the whole terror of the successive images before they were shaped by utterance—the mangled Tybalt seemed there in his shroud, while the reader gasped out the words. Then a sound like a stifled scream burst from him, and his hand fell heavily upon his book; and when his aspect of concentrated terror changed with the changing thought, and love profound and holy passed into his face while he spoke the words, 'And die an unstained wife,' the relief was exquisite, and brought down tears like rain.

Such an intensity of emotion as Macready owned is necessary — absolutely necessary for the true interpretation of this scene, which is either the greatest or the worst in the tragedy. If there is not the whole inward passion present in the actress or the reader, the images which are its upheavings appear strained, and the poet and performer both seem to rant, for I take the true meaning of the word ‘rant’ to be noise and bluster without real passion. Another great point in Macready’s reading of ‘Romeo and Juliet’ was the tender beauty of the close of the tragedy in the reconciliation of the two houses, which left upon the hearers such an impression of sweet solemnity as might well belong to a religious service.

And now, with the self-abnegation of friendship, I am going to relate the true particulars of a lesson in reading which Macready’s kindness bestowed upon me.

Katie Macready had by chance once heard me read some sympathetic piece of poetry, and had resolved that her father should foster what she supposed to be a gift in me. It was then upon her persuasion that he asked me to read to him, and offered to give me lessons. I said I doubted my own courage, and yet I could not refuse such an offer. I would try to read to him if I might choose my own author and piece, and I suggested the fifth canto of Dante's "Inferno" in my husband's translation (the story of Francesca da Rimini).

'No,' said Macready, with a smile which had something of reproof in it; 'you are selecting a thing well known to you, and of which you feel tolerably secure, in order to veil your faults. Now, if you wish really to learn, you must accept something, on the contrary, that will bring them out in strong relief. I don't want to accuse

you of vanity, but this looks a little like it.'

I was troubled by the truth of his reflection, and by his penetrating look. So there was a pause, and presently he said :

'What is your decision? Will you read to me?'

'I will try.'

On this he rose and walked with his stately walk to the bookcase, and I saw him take from behind its glass doors a volume of Milton. I went after him, and detaining his arm for a moment, pleaded :

'No, no; not Milton.'

'Yes, yes; certainly Milton.'

'What! the most difficult of all writers to read?'

'Yes, for he will best exhibit your worst faults.'

'Cruel !'



‘Kind.’

I had to do it, and began to read the part of the Attendant Spirit (‘Comus’) from ‘Before the starry threshold’ down to ‘the palace of Eternity.’

Then he said: ‘You may pause now; I have enough to tell you. Bring me the book.’

I took the volume to him, and stood behind him, looking over his shoulder, while he laid his hand upon the page, pointed to the first stage direction, and spoke it: ‘Enter an Attendant Spirit.’ He pronounced the word ‘spirit’ impressively, and looked up at me so as to fix my attention.

‘Here, then,’ he said, ‘is a spirit addressing mortals, and telling them of the exalted places where he has his dwelling, and whence he has descended to communicate with them: not in the tone which you might well use to tell me

you were hemming that pocket-handkerchief' (pointing to one I had left unfinished on the table), 'could such a communication be made ; yet you have read in just such a tone, and you failed not only in impressiveness, but in distinctness. Your words merged into each other, and your mouth was not sufficiently open. You lost your breath, too, in the passage of "calm and serene air." In reading you must carefully consider how long your breath will serve, before you enter upon a period. A breath taken in the wrong place destroys the power of expression. Now, are you disgusted, or will you try again ?

'I will try again.'

'Well, take the Lady this time.'

I began from 'This way the noise was,' and went on to 'airy tongues that syllable men's names.'

'That is much better read ; perhaps because you felt less alarm ; but there were

many of the same faults: your mouth not well opened, and not a sufficient variety of tone. Sweetness alone is not enough—a constant sweetness tires the ear—you must do yourself a violence, and shock yourself by the sound of your own voice in its full power, before you can so command its inflections as to make a good reader. Practise alone for a time, aiming only at distinctness; then consider the breathing, and then think of the expression. I am not sparing you, am I? No; for I should feel it a bad compliment to your judgment to reserve your faults.’

Here the door of the library was opened, some visitor was announced, and so the reading was suspended.

As soon as I conveniently could I retired to my room, and made the notes from which I am now writing. The date of them is July, 1853—thirty-one years ago.

Afterwards Macready mentioned that

at the epoch of his final retirement from the stage, he had entertained thoughts of adding to his income by teaching elocution, but that he had abandoned the scheme with the conviction that no man could teach feeling; and to teach the rest without that, would only be to engraft his own manner upon another. Every actor necessarily had a manner of his own, every individual had a manner, and in an imitator that manner would become a mannerism; he did not wish to be the founder of a mannered school.

Some question being now put to him concerning amateur acting, he said he had in the whole course of his experience seen only one amateur who, if transported to the stage at once, would have made a great public performer. This was a Miss Wellesley; in charm and even in diction she was not inferior to Mrs. Jordan: she had her spontaneous grace, a grace which

in the professional actress was the result of elaborate care. He had seen Mrs. Jordan insist upon the repetition of a scene twenty times in order to make sure of the effect of her exit: this amount of labour was not to be found in amateurs, nor, if it were, would that alone succeed—no, not even when allied, as in many cases it was, to remarkable intelligence and sensibility. What was wanting in the amateur was freedom—freedom of passion, freedom of diction, freedom of movement. The whole training of drawing-room life, where self-restraint was the one great lesson, went against it.

From the subject of play-actors the conversation shifted to that of play-writers; and Macready said, how many half-poets he had known who had gifts which might have led to greatness if that of patience had been added. They were willing to do, but not willing to suffer:

to do and to suffer was the part of the true poet ; the quality of strong endurance was necessary to complete the work of genius. How often he had said to those who submitted their works to him, ‘ It is cleverly begun, but it is not finished ; you must labour to finish it ;’ and how often the applicants had upon this turned wearily away from him and from their task. He sometimes found himself called upon to give an opinion in cases where criticism could be of no use, and he then had recourse to the equivocal phrase of, ‘ A most extraordinary production.’ This was paltering in a double sense ; and on one occasion he was punished for his insincerity by seeing the work published with his words quoted by way of advertisement !

One evening a letter arrived from Bridport, inviting Macready to give a lecture there. He thought of giving one

already written upon 'Toleration;' but he hardly knew whether it really contained anything worth listening to. We, upon this, requested him to rehearse it to us, and he consented. But when the hour came for redeeming his promise, he was, as usual on such occasions, in such a state of nervousness that he could barely speak. There was no affectation in this. He was white with agitation, although there was no one present but ourselves, his daughter Katie, and his sister.

He said, while he turned over the leaves of his MS. rapidly :

'I really can't read.'

*Chorus.* 'Why not?'

*Macready.* 'I feel ashamed: it is nothing—worth nothing. I would rather read you some Milton instead.'

*Chorus.* 'Our minds are not prepared for Milton; we expect the lecture.'

*Macready* (still turning over the leaves

with agitation). 'Well, but really there is no matter in it.'

*Chorus.* 'Then it can be no matter if we hear it.'

*Macready.* 'It is literally a string of quotations.'

*Chorus.* 'Then it will be all the easier for you ; a mere reading of poetry.'

*Macready.* 'You really are very provoking.'

*Chorus.* 'We mean to provoke you to read. Now begin.'

*Macready.* 'I feel I shall break down.'

*Chorus.* 'Better here than at Bridport.'

*Macready.* 'I see that I must.'

And so he began, and, once launched, sailed grandly on ; now and then, it is true, pausing in the opening pages to ask whether he should continue, but rising with his subject, gaining confidence with his own growing interest and that of his



audience; and in the passages of poetry he introduced from Dryden's 'Pastor,' from Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village,' and from the 'Pilgrim Fathers' of Felicia Hemans; there was that fervour, that tenderness, that solemnity, and that rare music which none could forget who ever heard, and which none can ever describe.

At the conclusion of the lecture, which was excellent both in argument and expression, the Chorus expressed surprise at his doubts about it; and he replied that he had read in some journal a criticism of a lecture he had given at Sherborne, in which it was said that he should be content with his eminence in his own profession, and not attempt to speak on subjects for which he had no special vocation. He pondered over the criticism, and thought it might be just, and that possibly he was deficient in the reasoning faculty. From this observation we passed on to the

motive of the lecture ; and Macready expressed a fear of being intolerant of intolerance. He warmed as he talked ; and he said : ‘ I cannot find any excuse for the parson who would set me down as an atheist because I don’t sympathize with every word of the Church Service, nor with all its professions of faith ; yet I ought, I know I ought, to tolerate the bigot, though I dissent from him. I doubt whether any two human beings are exactly agreed upon the topic of religious belief : it is a tangled maze, and while we each know our own difficulties, our inward strivings, our hopes, and our fears, how tender we should be of censuring the opinion which another has arrived at, and which he clings to as a refuge from doubt !’

The conversation turned upon the speculations of a future world ; and it was evident that Macready willingly embraced the theory of the plurality of worlds—of a state

of progression through other inhabited planets. He said :

‘The notion of our earth alone being inhabited seems to me a conceited one. I sympathize with the feeling of old Fuseli the painter, who, as he walked up and down with me on a terrace one fine clear night, looked up at the myriads of stars above him, and said, “Perhaps I shall be among them soon.” His tone was deep and solemn ; it thrilled me through.’

Macready went on to say that he could not heartily admire Fuseli as a painter, not only because there was eccentricity in his work, but because there was a positive absence of beauty—his elongated forms were carried to the point of distortion ; and he disliked his treatment of the Rimini subject, where the woman seemed to struggle away from the man. Some remarks on Maclise followed (Maclise was the painter then in vogue), and Macready

lamented that in his picture of Macbeth he did not contrive to hide the faces of the witches. He said :

‘ Three ugly old faces make no impression of awe ; had they been concealed from us we might have shuddered at their imagined supernatural hideousness, seeing its effect in the looks of the bystanders. I said so to Maclise ; but he did not agree with me. Yet I cannot doubt that a horror can be better conveyed by the feeling of alarm exhibited in the face that looks at it, than by any attempt at painting ugliness. Maclise has no notion of effect without crowd ; he has considerable power of detail, but he uses it too lavishly. He should study such a sensation as that produced by Michael Angelo’s solitary figure of Adam in his Creation. When I first saw it, I was quite shaken by its grandeur. He follows with a look of desolation the departing skirts of the Creator. What a sense of

loneliness is here conveyed! and how powerfully the thought is carried out and executed. I remember telling Eastlake how much I felt this desolation, and he said it was to him a new idea; he dwelt on it with pleasure.

‘I entreated Maclise to go and study in Italy; but he said he hated travelling alone, and if he went, it must be with Dickens. No, I answered, that will not do; you would get no study—only pleasure; for Dickens has a clutching eye—gets his impressions at once—is given to activity, and would not care to linger for contemplation.’

Macready went on to dwell upon the genius of Dickens, upon his irresistible humour, his force, and his extraordinary powers of perception. He only regretted that he should let his own opinions appear so strongly in his novels, for, said he, ‘I hold it to be the business of a novelist to

narrate, without any interruption whatever of personal feeling : animus on the part of the writer begets resistance in the reader.'

'But what a marvellous describer Dickens is ! how comprehensive his glance ! What a power he has of penetrating his reader with his idea ! I have laughed at Mr. F.'s Aunt in "Little Dorrit," till I was nearly choked ; and the lover's inventions for his own epitaph (in the same work) seemed to come home to me. I began to think I had composed the very same epitaphs for myself, at some remote period of my life, of which I had forgotten the when and the how.'

The conversation now turned upon Walter Scott's novels. Macready spoke of 'Old Mortality' as the one to be most frequently re-read with delight. 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' he said, was perhaps more perfect in construction, and was certainly stronger in passion ; but it was

too painful. He differed from an observation made on 'Guy Mannering' that it was deficient in arrangement, and saw no other fault in the telling of the story than the letters of Julia Mannering; he looked upon them as a blot on the work.

He spoke of the deep pathos of the later scenes of 'Waverley,' and said that it contained the best-told ghost-story to be met with anywhere—that of the 'Boddah Glas.' He read it aloud one evening to his daughter Katie, as they sat alone together. After it was finished, he sat down to write a letter, and wondered that Katie didn't go to bed. When twelve o'clock struck, he asked her why she was still there, but got no answer; then the reason suggested itself to him, and he said:

'Why, Katie, are you afraid to go alone?'

'Yes, papa. Oh! oh! the Boddah Glas!'

There was now some talk of poets.

Macready spoke of Campbell's power as a war-poet, and dwelt with delight on the animating strains of the 'Mariners of England,' the 'Battle of the Baltic,' and 'Hohenlinden.' There were passages of tender beauty, too, in his 'Gertrude of Wyoming;' and there was real pathos in the Indian's history, and in his lullaby; but it was in his shorter pieces that he showed as a true poet.

Illustrating his observations, Macready recited 'The Exile of Erin' in deep murmuring tones, lingering upon every expression of tenderness with that sensitive appreciation of his author which made his hearers always recognise in him the presence of a poet no less than that of a great actor.

He afterwards read out Mrs. Hemans's 'Pilgrim Fathers,' in which the swell of his voice gave the notion of the sound of the sea. It was a very fine thing.



Then he gave us the 'Captive Knight,' by the same author, in which the prisoner hears from the interior of his cell the music of a passing regiment outside his dungeon walls, with the vain longing to join it. Here the voice of the prisoner was raised almost to a scream, as if striving against the clarion's sound; and afterwards, when the procession had passed, it sank into a low murmur of complaint. The effect was startling and very moving.

Some talk was then continued on the subject of poetry; and Macready said of Shelley that his imagery was glorious, but that his long pieces were not re-read with pleasure, because they were deficient in feeling.

He spoke, however, of the tragedy of 'The Cenci' as an exception. It was a great work; its passion was immense; it was at once a fine poem and a fine tragedy. It was a pity that the subject of it made

it impossible for the stage, for it was a drama of extraordinary power.

In speaking of Byron, Macready said that he found his finest thoughts in his plays. What could be more beautiful than the description of the night at Venice in 'The Foscari'? 'Werner' was the only one of his tragedies which contained not a single poetical line.

Of Robert Browning Macready spoke much, and with glowing enthusiasm; he said that he pored over the pages of 'Paracelsus' with ever-increasing delight. He held Browning to be one of the few great poets of the world. And let me here remind the reader that Browning was not at that time appreciated as he is now. He was then a young poet, whose force was gathering some distinguished admirers round him; but he was not the centre of an admiring crowd. Macready was a man who thought for himself, for the most

part silently, always deeply ; and doing so, his opinions became to him the most cherished part of himself, so that he asked—I might almost say demanded—from his friends a sympathy of taste.

He was disturbed by the discovery that I had not read ‘Paracelsus,’ and that I knew nothing of Browning beyond his name. He lifted his eyebrows ; he muttered expressions of wonder ; he once or twice said, ‘Oh, good God!’ he took a turn or two up and down the room, and then said, ‘I really am quite at a loss ; I cannot understand it.’

I pleaded the claims of the babies ; they left me little time, etc.

To which he replied, ‘Hand over the babies to the nurse, and read “Paracelsus.”’

As I sat silent and somewhat downcast, he smiled, and said, ‘Will you allow me to read it to you?’

It was in this way that I learnt long ago—thirty years ago—to feel the genius of Robert Browning.

Macready brought to the study of poetry many rare qualities : intense sensibility, vivid perception, patient thought, and extended knowledge. No man knew better how to make the most of his time. At the age of sixteen he was called away from Rugby, and required to fill the arduous and disagreeable post of manager of a provincial company. From this moment he worked incessantly at his laborious profession. Two sisters and a brother were also under his care ; he had to think for them, to think for himself, and to think for his company. Yet he found opportunities for continually enlarging his field of knowledge on foreign ground as well as on his own. There was hardly a French philosophical work which he had not mastered ; Voltaire he knew

almost by heart. The French classical drama he was intimately acquainted with; and, though he spoke French with an English accent, Rachel—the great Rachel—used her remarkable persuasive powers to induce him to act with her. It was a temptation which it required all his reason and all his force to resist; he had a hard struggle with himself, but finally replied to her, ‘I cannot consent; for my accent would do injustice to your poet, and therefore to you.’

He knew Italian well, too, and the great Italian poets he had taken to his heart. It was to please him that my husband gave a lecture upon Dante at the Town Hall at Sherborne. On this occasion I was surprised to see Macready exceedingly nervous, because he had a few words of introduction to speak; he was pale and agitated. It happened that while he was speaking, my husband was

turning over the notes for his lecture; and Macready, quite unable to endure the rustling sound, looked at him imploringly, and uttered an 'Oh, don't!' that had in it a tone of agony.

Afterwards, when he took his place among the audience, he applauded loudly with his umbrella whenever applause was possible, for he knew how trying it was to speak without a response. On our way home, I spoke to Macready of a passage in the discourse descriptive of Dante's peculiar temper, as reminding me of his own. 'But,' said he, in answer, 'Dante was less irritable; and if chafed, it was about greater things.'

I observed, during the lecture, his emotion at passages which described the love of Dante for Beatrice; and seeing him evidently depressed on our return home, I very early wished him good-night, and we all retired to our rooms. The next morn-

ing I told his sister Letitia that I had noticed his perturbation, and attributed it to the recurring thought of his dear lost wife. Letitia replied :

‘Yes, it was so ; the love of Dante for Beatrice brought back to his mind his own heart’s desire. Dante never forgot the little girl in the crimson frock. William for ever remembers his Catherine as the beautiful light-haired little Scotch girl in the plaid frock, when he first saw her crossing a bridge upon the stage.’

The next day there were no signs of the night’s trouble, and walking and talking in the garden went on as usual. The merits of ‘Clarissa Harlowe’ were discussed, and Macready mentioned that Sheil read it all through once a year. As for himself, he could not do that ; its theme was too persistently painful, and even revolting, to make that possible for him. But the power of the work could not be disputed ;

its semblance of truth was at times marvellous, and he felt that the beauty of Clarissa's character redeemed the subject from its offence. But it was only when the movement of strong passion began to work that he recognised the characters as flesh and blood. Then, indeed, Clarissa came out true and noble, it was then too that her cousin Morden appeared upon the scene as a fine and distinct character, and not only the personages became more human, but the diction of the author rose with the feeling. Lovelace he held to be the most revolting character ever represented in fiction: what could have been the nature of those ladies who entreated Richardson to spare his life!

When we took leave of Macready at the close of our visit, he said with a smile to me:

'You must come back, or I shall think I have offended you with my remarks on



your reading; you must come back and read to me again.'

I promised that I would; but though the visit was repeated, the lessons in reading were dropped—not from any disinclination to resume them, but because other pursuits interfered, and there were other demands upon our attention. Macready's eldest son Willie and his wife were then staying with him, having been at Madeira on account of ill health, and they were now about to return to Ceylon. He was deeply attached to this son; he loved his presence in the room, and would frequently look up from his book to assure himself of his presence: 'Willie! Willie! where's Willie?' There was a constant solicitude about him, with an effort to hide it.

Macready's passionate nature was capable of self-control when there was time to exert it. This power over himself was called forth by an ill-judged piece of sympathy

from a bystander, who said : ‘How much you will miss Willie when he goes!’ (he was to go the following day). Macready replied, with a cheerful tone and a smile :

‘Oh, I have parted with him so often, that custom makes me think nothing of it.’

His son looked at him gravely while he spoke, and turned very pale.

The weather was intensely hot ; we sat for the most part under the shade of a large tree in the garden rather than in the house, and under these circumstances Macready poured out his thoughts freely. He spoke of the probability of his leaving Sherborne in the course of two years ; he said he felt he must do it for the sake of his boy’s education, but it would be to him a rooting up, and when he did it he should consider it as a winding-up of his affairs. The quiet and the space he enjoyed at Sherborne were grateful to him. The house to others might seem empty now ; to him

it was full. Yes, full of memories : it was a seat of fond remembrances : the inevitable had to be endured, and he endured it, not without gratitude for what he once enjoyed. His world was now the past : and the future, he pondered on the future, but he hardly could shape its hopes. The doctrine of Pythagoras he could not accept, for he could not understand it. How could we be punished and rewarded if we forfeited our personal identity ? Reason could find no solution to this problem. He rather inclined to the notion of passing on from planet to planet in ever-advancing perfection in a continual progress of knowledge.

Macready rejected the use of sedatives to soothe mental pain. He would not, he said, do so much injustice to the powers of endurance given him by God. Cigars had been recommended to him ; he would not have recourse to them for relief. No ; he

would not obscure the memory of love by such fumes.

Speaking of the disadvantages attending the theatrical profession, Macready said that one of its most serious drawbacks was the immediate applause following every effort. Excitement was thus continually kept up—there was great emotion when the applause was given, great irritability when it was withheld ; and to this was added the constant drawing upon the sensibility and the imaginative faculties, a process which was exhausting to the nervous system, and which was likely to disorder the proper mental balance. It required extraordinary resolution in the artist to combat these influences. To see any of his children upon the stage would be his greatest trial.

Here I interrupt my narrative to say that I have heard this same sentiment recently expressed, almost word for word,

by the finest living comedian and by the most distinguished living tragedian of France—two men so entirely dissimilar in their general way of thought that their communion of feeling in this particular deserves attention. But although the special reasons which Macready brought forward against the theatrical profession could not be altered by an improvement in the social position of the artists, it ought to be remembered that the feeling of the great French actors here quoted is probably in some sort influenced by the contempt of their calling even now exhibited by the bulk of French society, a contempt which existed, though in a lesser degree, in English society during the greater part of Macready's career, and which yielded only partially to his efforts for the redemption of the stage, which awaited the arrival of Henry Irving for its completion.

At the present time all honour is paid to

the dramatic profession when its professors are honourable, and the probable consequence of this change in public opinion will be a change—gradual perhaps, but still perceptible—in the moral condition of the whole army of comedians, extending from its most prominent members to its rank and file.

Every art has its own peculiar temptations against which the artist has to struggle, not without pain and peril. Let all who have been able to resist receive the honour due to conquerors, and let no high art be condemned because some of its disciples have succumbed.

A discussion arising upon the use of friendly counsel, Macready told an anecdote of Miss Martineau, who on one occasion strongly endeavoured to dissuade a friend from a course of action which she thought discreditable. Her friend listened patiently and then replied : ‘ But I must die if I do

otherwise ;' and Miss Martineau rejoined :  
' Why, then, do die.'

' Good advice, perhaps,' said Macready ;  
' but you may be quite sure that it was not  
followed.'

In the course of some talk about the Russian War (the topic of the day), Macready spoke with warmth of Mr. Franklin Lushington's striking verses of 'The Grenadiers' March,' and said they had really excited him when he first read them. They fell on his ears like the sound of musketry, and recalled to his memory the delightful sensation he had when upon passing into Canada, after a residence in America, he first saw British troops exercising and the British flag flying. Then all the strength of his patriotism flowed into his heart at once. There was a swing in Mr. Lushington's verse which was very stimulating.

Some discussion ensued upon poetry

and poets, in which Macready expressed contempt for the personal character of Thomas Moore, and said that in the correspondence between Lord John Russell and Croker, published in the *Quarterly Review*, 'he cut a most shabby figure. He was never truly in earnest in anything. Why, I remember hearing him say to Sheil, who was eulogizing Lord Holland: "Sheil, he is an Englishman and a lord," in a tone of condemnation that was startling. How unlike this was to the general tenour of his diary!'

Macready spoke of 'Adam Bede' with delight. He said that its high stamp, its gravity, its thoughtfulness, the largeness of its views, the force of its style, had bound him with a feeling of deep reverential homage to the writer.

I ventured to say that I discerned a woman's hand in it, though at that time the work was generally supposed to be a man's.



Macready argued strongly against this idea, and asked on what it was founded. I replied that it was in the general treatment of the relation between the sexes, and especially in man's indifference to woman's intellectual as compared with her physical gifts that I recognised a woman's observation. I thought I saw a certain irritation in the remarks on this subject which a man would not feel. One of Macready's charms in conversation was his power of listening, the rarest of all gifts but one which is perhaps acquired by the habit of the stage, where each personage must have his say. He listened if he was not convinced. Some months afterwards it became known that a woman was the author of 'Adam Bede.'

In one of his happy moods, Macready told an anecdote of Mr. G., a temperance preacher at Sherborne, accusing himself publicly of violence, injustice, cruelty, and

all kinds of vice done in his former days of intemperance. A voice from the crowd exclaimed :

‘ Yes, I can bear witness to that ;’ upon which Mr. G. replied :

‘ It is false.’

Macready chuckled with great enjoyment over this recollection, and then followed it with another. A man coming home to his wife, furious, frantic, kicking the chairs and tables about in his rage, his wife gently remonstrated :

‘ My dear, my dear, what is the matter ?’

‘ What is the matter ? Why, Jones has called me a liar.’

‘ Well, dear, well ; never mind. Why should you care when it is not true ?’

‘ Oh, but he has proved it.’

Presently the scene in ‘ Oliver Twist ’ of Fagin teaching the boys to pick pockets was discussed.

‘ How painful it is,’ said Macready ;

‘and yet who can resist laughter at the details of this training?’

Some anecdotes of successful pick-pocketing followed, and Macready said :

‘I remember on one occasion seeing a boy giving chase to another in front of me with breathless haste, and appealing to me as he ran for help : “ Catch him, sir, catch him ! He is a thief, sir, a thief ! ” I followed a sudden impulse to assist in the pursuit, and on catching the thief found, to my great surprise, that the stolen article was my own pocket-handkerchief.

‘ Will you give him in charge, sir ? ’ said a policeman. I was strongly tempted to answer no, and to let the boy go ; but a moment’s reflection checked this desire, and he was given in charge. Poor creature ! he pleaded guilty.’

This recollection seemed still to pain Macready. Afterwards he said :

‘ The best pickpocketing trick I ever

heard of was practised in broad daylight in the streets of London, where a gentleman was surrounded, hustled, and thrown down by three men, two of whom emptied his pockets, while the other tickled him. He was thrown into convulsions of laughter, and though at intervals he gasped out "Murder! murder!" the many passers-by concluded from his apparent merriment that it was all play.'

'I don't think *I* should laugh at being tickled in such circumstances,' said one of Macready's children, to which Macready replied, bursting with laughter himself at the thought of it:

'Oh, yes you would. You must if you were very ticklish.'

His stress on the word ticklish was so rich in its humour that it infected us all, and we laughed in chorus like a set of fools till we were too hot to laugh any more.

One morning I found Macready looking disturbed, with a newspaper in his hand, and asked him if it contained disagreeable intelligence. He sighed and handed over to me a long description of a production of the 'Winter's Tale' at the then favourite theatre of London. This disquisition set forth every detail of scenery, of decoration, and of costume, of grouping, and of colour, with only a very scant mention of the acting. After I had perused it, Macready made sad comments upon the nature of the supposed criticism.

'Evidently,' said he, 'the accessories swallow up the poetry and the action.'

'True,' said I, seeking to comfort him ; 'but don't take it to heart. You are out of it all now.'

'Do you know,' said he, 'why I take it so much to heart? It is because I feel myself in some measure responsible. I, in my endeavour to give to Shakespeare all

his attributes, to enrich his poetry with scenes worthy of its interpretation, to give to his tragedies their due magnificence, and to his comedies their entire brilliancy, have set an example which is accompanied with great peril, for the public is willing to have the magnificence without the tragedy, and the poet is swallowed up in display. When I read such a description as this of the production of a great drama, I am touched with a feeling something like remorse. Is it possible, I ask myself. Did *I* hold the torch? Did *I* point out the path?

The conversation then took a fresh turn.

Some observations being made upon dramatic writing, Macready mentioned Edward Bulwer, the late Lord Lytton, as the most courteous dramatist he had ever come across. Whenever the question of stage effect arose, he was willing to take the actor's opinion, and to sacrifice his own

idea. He was patient and never showed any irritability. Macready observed generally that it was much easier to deal with an author of high reputation than with a young aspirant.

\* \* \* \* \*

The conversations recorded in these last pages took place during our final visit to Sherborne. After this, Macready's domestic trials came fast and thick. Illness and death occupied his time and his thoughts. Once or twice he came to London ; and on one of these occasions he drove down with me to the Crystal Palace. He had a special desire to see the antediluvian beasts.

‘For what a start,’ said he, ‘it gives to thought to know that there was a world full of these creatures before man was made ! What was the purpose of their existence ? What was the manner of it ? Everything connected with this subject is to me full of intense interest.’

We, therefore, went to see these things in spite of a very stormy wind beating against us as we crossed the grounds to find them.

‘They are clumsy and awkward,’ said Macready, contemplating them not without disgust ; ‘and comparing them with the creatures of a later date, we might almost regard them as an experiment in creation.’

Afterwards we lingered long in Michael Angelo’s Court, and as we emerged from it among the trees and statues, Macready paused before a group representing Cain and his family, with an inscription on the pedestal of ‘My grief is more than I can bear.’

‘This,’ he said, ‘has true passion in it. The clinging tenderness of the wife is beautiful, and so is the sympathy of the children with its different character, with its questioning grief. Does it strike you ? To me it is impressive.’

‘Yes,’ I replied. ‘A year ago when I



was here I stopped to look at this same group, and I then felt its pathos as I do now. It is by a French sculptor.'

We then came before the Satan, by Lough.

'That is a hopeless attempt,' said Macready. 'Satan is no subject either for the brush or the chisel. Only the poet can master *him*.'

On our way home we stopped at West Croydon, in order that Macready might visit, at her school there, the daughter of Mrs. Warner, the tragic actress, then recently dead, after much suffering. He remained there for a quarter of an hour, and when he rejoined me I saw signs of perturbation in his countenance. The poor child had not seen him for a whole year, and she had been quite overcome with joy at the sight of him. She had become to him an object of affectionate solicitude, because of the virtues of her dead mother. His generosity and

humanity showed themselves practically in this as in a thousand other cases, but the good he did was little known, and I do not intend here to publish actions which he did not care to publish himself.

The heavy weight of affliction which fell upon Macready in the days of his life set aside for peace, chastened without fretting him ; he never complained, and if he grew graver he also grew tenderer : he had a manly horror of a ‘coddled grief.’ I never but once saw him break down ; this once was in the midst of his reading of ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ in the summer following the death of Catherine, his wife. He read the whole with firmness and with a beauty which I have attempted to describe, until he came to the passage :

‘O my love, my wife !

Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath,  
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty,’

when his voice gave way and was interrupted by a storm of sobs which shook his strong frame, and he fell forward with his face upon the book from which he was reading—a large quarto volume. No one stirred: no other sound was to be heard; there was no weakness in this passion, the force of the man was felt in it, and we were all under its dominion. Presently he rose and left the room: nobody followed him. Letitia, his sister, wept now without restraint; the rest was silence; only Willie pressed my hand for a moment. After a pause of ten minutes Macready returned, walked straight to his seat, and resumed his reading. At the conclusion Katie said to me:

‘You don’t look quite fit for dining out.’

‘Dining out!’ I exclaimed with astonishment; ‘how do you mean dining out?’

‘Why,’ said Katie, ‘I must wake you

from your dream ; we are asked, and you also, and we have accepted the invitation, to dine early with Lady Medlycott to-day.'

'We must send an excuse,' said I ; 'look at your father, look at Willie, and look at yourself in the glass.'

'We can't send an excuse,' said Katie ; 'the party was made for papa, and in two hours we must set out. Don't suggest an excuse ; if he doesn't go to-day, he will never leave these doors again.'

She was right. So we all retired to wash the tears from our faces, and presently the fly arrived to take us to dinner.

Macready then appeared in the hall : he was very pale. He walked up and down, was reluctant to go, and presently he was seized with a fit of faintness ; a glass of sherry restored him, and at last we all set out. We found a warm wel-

come, and everything was done to make the party a pleasant one. Macready exerted himself to take his proper share of the conversation, and shone as a listener to one person present who was generally regarded as a bore.

It was much to be lamented that domestic sorrows shut him up so much, and deprived so many of the interest which always attended his presence.

Macready's devotion, after the death of his Catherine, to the youngest child, three years old, that she left behind her, was unceasing—the boy Johnnie—for Jonathan, was delicate, fair like his mother, thin and anxious-looking. His father watched over him, gave him his unwelcome necessary doses of cod-liver oil, brought him to London, to consult Brodie, and having no servant with him, washed and dressed him, put him to bed, heard him say his prayers, sat by his bedside

till he slept, as a tender mother does, and even curled his flaxen locks with his own hands.

Macready's heaviest anxiety was the illness of his boy Harry, to which he finally succumbed in 1857. His mother's nervous temperament disabled her from dealing with the attacks of this suffering child. The father, indeed, was the only one of the family who knew how to anticipate and often to ward off his convulsions. Nothing could exceed his patience, his care, his forbearance, his loving courage, in dealing with this son ; he was his frequent companion, and was often his playmate.

In this trial, as in all others, Macready found in the active sympathy of Charles Dickens, a constant resource. Dickens devised amusements for the child ; he wrote to him diverting comical letters, suited to his comprehension ; he sent

him all kinds of tokens of his feeling for him; and the boy, who had a great capacity for love, repaid this care and thought with a most lively affection; his face became all smiles at the very mention of his name; he was next to his father in his heart.

I think we never visited Sherborne without carrying there some token of the friendship of Dickens—a friendship which, beginning, as our own began, with ardent admiration for the actor, augmented almost daily with the intimate knowledge of the man. Of all friends, Dickens was the truest; he was enthusiastic, and he was steadfast; no work and no trouble of his own impeded him, if he believed that his friend wanted him; he shared trials which to his sensitive nature were especially painful, and lightened them by his care; he was the last friend (outside the family circle) who saw Catherine (Mrs. Macready) in her

sinking condition. The last flush of pleasure that passed over her face was caused by the sight of him ; and as he took her hand to say farewell, she, sinking back exhausted in her chair, said feebly and faintly, ‘Charles Dickens, I had almost embraced you—what a friend you have been !’ He stooped and kissed her forehead ; and when he was next one of the family circle the mother was no longer there.

In the latter days of Macready’s life, when the weight of time and of sorrow pressed him down, Dickens was his most frequent visitor ; he cheered him with narratives of bygone days ; he poured some of his own abundant warmth into his heart ; he led him into his old channels of thought ; he gave readings to rouse his interest ; he waked up in him again, by his vivid descriptions, his sense of humour—he conjured back his smile and his laugh.



Charles Dickens was and is to me the ideal of friendship.

All the consolation that sympathy can give in affliction, Macready had. His second wife, Cecilia Spencer, whom he married eight years after the death of Catherine, brought to him a treasure of devotion and pleasant ways. The affection with which he inspired her owed nothing to the particular bent of his genius. She had never seen a play. She did not know what acting was. But in Macready's presence she felt a power which impressed her ; the things he said, and his way of saying them stirred her thought and feeling. When she paid visits to a friend who lived at Sherborne, she often found him in poor men's cottages reading to the sick and relieving want. She had heard of him as a proud man ; she found him a gentle one. He was old ; she was still fresh and fair. But when she knew that he loved her, she

knew also that he was very dear to her.

She was the dearest friend of Katie, and remained so to the last ; and she became a true mother to Cecilia Benvenuta—the little girl described in these pages, as brimful of love and frolic.

The death of Katie out at sea, on her return from Madeira, recorded in Macready's diaries, he never rallied from. She was very interesting—with a certain vein of poetry in her, and with a good deal of enthusiasm, which found its vent after many struggles in true piety. She was the friend of the sick and the suffering ; and 'the good Miss Macready' was lamented by many outside the doors of her own home when her loss became known. Her remarkable power of reading derived from her father often made a great impression. She was teacher at Cheltenham in a reformatory for girls, who made it a point

with their other instructors to impede them by every possible annoyance, giggling and scoffing, especially when chapters from the Bible were given. When Katie Macready began to read a chapter from Isaiah, they were ready, as usual, to mock and interrupt ; but as she went on, her fervent feeling, her rich tones, her perfect phrasing excited a wholly new emotion. They were shaken sometimes by tenderness, sometimes by terror—their sobs were heard ; and when the book was closed they left their places, and with one accord advancing close to her, said : ‘Teacher, go on — when you speak, it is as if we heard the thunder—tell us more.’

This one anecdote is sufficient to explain the lamentation which followed the death of Katie, who had worked so zealously and with so much power in Cheltenham.

Miss Macready, it was said, could never be replaced.

My last sight of Macready was in 1871—two years before his death, when he came to London to consult Sir Henry Thompson, whose skill considerably alleviated his sufferings. At this time Macready could only whisper; his brain was clear as ever, but his hands being paralyzed and his voice being nearly extinct, it was a great labour to communicate his thoughts. On one occasion I saw that there was something he wished to say, and I leant my head against his shoulder, so as to catch the faint sounds.

‘I have had,’ he said, ‘some new ideas about Iago. Original, I am sure—true, I think.’

‘Whisper them to me,’ I said.

‘I cannot—there is so much to say. I cannot talk long enough to tell them, and yet they might have value.’

This impossibility of communication was deeply to be regretted, for Macready’s

mind retained its ascendancy : it was still expressed in his face, and still felt in his general bearing.

With a poetical description by Kate Macready of the arrival of Cecilia, her step-mother, at Sherborne, I shall close all that is personal concerning Macready, in this record.

The description is a true one, and, as I have before said, the grateful love which then rushed into the heart of the daughter and overflowed in words which may be called pictorial—filled her soul to the last hour of her existence, was closely interwoven with her devotion to her father, and stood the test of the wear and tear and daily trials of life.

Katie kept a journal during her voyage home from Madeira—very dear to those who loved her, but too introspective for publication. It is enough to say that the victory of the mind over the body, and of

love and faith over death, were never more evident than in that diary.

I think that Macready attached importance to the place of burial of those he loved, and that he meditated with frequent pain upon the 'vast and wandering grave' of this dear child.

#### THE STEPMOTHER.\*

The day died out in dreariness and dread,  
Grim shadows crept though hall and corridor,  
While fading firelight lurid flickering shed  
Athwart the panelled walls and oaken floor.

Around the cheerless hearth the children pressed,  
Pale, patient, brooding on the dreaded morrow  
(Like half-fledged birds forsaken in the nest),  
Too cowed to weep, too dulled with gloom and  
sorrow.

Upon the wall the treasured portrait hung—  
That well-remembered smile for ever gone,  
That pure white neck round which their arms had  
clung,  
Those lips once warm with kiss and benison.

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\* 'Cowl and Cap.' Moxon and Co., 1865.

At every fancied footfall, white with fear,  
The children started, trembled, glanced around,  
Gazed in each other's eyes, and seemed to hear  
The stranger's voice in every passing sound.  
How will she come, with frown, or baleful smile  
Yet fearful, to greet the shrinking throng?  
How look, how speak? Why tarries she meanwhile,  
Thus wantonly their torture to prolong?  
At last she comes. Hush, hush! unwelcome guest!  
Usurper of dead rites and dearest ties!  
Ah no! false fears: it is a vision blest—  
An angel stands before their glistening eyes,  
With such a smile as mild Madonnas wear,  
Oh, such a look—so gracious and so meek;  
The twilight glimmering round her golden hair,  
And tears of tender pity on her cheek.

I should be glad if I could convey to my readers some idea of Macready's distinctive qualities as an actor; of those attributes by which, not without a hard struggle, he achieved the high position as a tragedian, which, long before the day of his retirement, ceased to be disputed.

At the time of his first appearance, which was in 1817, he laboured under

many disadvantages; for then it seemed that the classical manner had been almost exhausted by John Kemble and his follower Charles Young, and that the so-called natural style was wholly occupied by the glorious Kean, who was at that time the idol of the public. A French critic has well said, that 'he adopted neither the purely natural, or Kean's style — nor the classical, or Kemble's; but that he was natural, classical, or romantic, according to the part he sustained.' He was indeed an essentially original actor; he was gifted by nature with a temperament singularly sensitive and imaginative; and it was in passages of profound sorrow, of concentrated solemn passion, that his great strength lay: the tones of suffering, between resignation and despair, the last utterances of a broken heart, were expressed by him so that the impression they made upon the hearer



became a part of his future existence. It was this power which gave a peculiar beauty to the closing scenes of 'Othello,' and which poetized the character of Macbeth ; which gasped out, ' I have done with life ' in Werner, which spoke Hamlet's soliloquies, and which, in the tragedy of Lear, soothed the cruel daughter with the words :

' I will not trouble thee, my child. Farewell !  
We'll no more meet, no more see one another.'

Macready often conferred poetry where it did not exist, elevating and enriching his theme, as in ' Werner ;' and when his author rose above the prosaic, he accompanied him with evident enthusiasm, his voice mounting and swelling in the fine passages, or lingering and enjoying as in a state of rapture. This poetical inspiration gave an interest to the dying scenes of ' Henry IV.' which they had never possessed for the public before, so that the second

part of this great historical play became a popular tragedy in Macready's time.

He was a master in the gradations of passion; he knew well how to raise an emotion by degrees to its full height, and had the skill to fill the cup of anguish drop by drop till it overflowed. In his *Lear* it seemed difficult to surpass the intensity of passion with which he spoke a curse upon the one daughter in the first act; yet this was as nothing to the succeeding passages, when Regan has taken Goneril by the hand. *Lear* was one of Macready's greatest performances, and was perhaps of all the most universally admired; its effect upon an audience was immense. It developed the insanity of the persecuted old king very gradually; it retained the peculiar character of age, representing the wanderings of infirm years, at that time of life when the passage from a healthy understanding to a dis-

ordered one is hastened by any additional weakening of the physical powers. Lear's overwhelming passion in his worn-out frame produced this change. And who that has heard can ever forget the storm of sighs and tears which shook the audience when the old man woke from his dream of madness, to fall upon Cordelia's neck with the unrestrained emotion of his great age. To the horror of the first acts this appeal to a softer sympathy came as a relief which was an actual necessity.

Macready's Hamlet was more discussed than his Lear. It was urged that the grace of movement was wanting which had given so much charm to the performance of this character by John Kemble. If this was true, it was, notwithstanding, a fine subject for study, because it was everywhere finely thought. To the opening scenes of the tragedy he imparted a solemn grandeur by his sense of the super-

natural. The idea of the world of the dead, from which a spirit came to commune with him alone, affected him with such an emotion of awe as dominated the tenderness with which the shape of that spirit was invested. The fear and wonder of it harrowed him ; his soul was shaken to its inmost depths by the marvel of this apparition ; but there was nothing physical in his fear. He knelt in reverence, almost in worship, but he was not afraid. Penetrated with the sublimity of such a vision, his own soul rose to reach it ; his deep tones swelled with the great harmonies of the poet ; he was exalted beyond the natural condition of man ; and it was this towering state which gave dignity to the wild and whirling words in the subsequent dialogue with Horatio, so long omitted on the stage before Macready restored them, knowing how he could use them.

By skilful touches he interpreted to us

the flexible impressionable Hamlet of Shakespeare, never strong even when most roused to action, alternately meditative and impassioned, deliberate and sudden; after his highest flights of passion, his spirits fell back, subsiding into the attitude of gentleness which was the essence of his nature, and which was enhanced, after an access of fury, by physical exhaustion. Thus, after he had frightened the king with false fire, and shouted his bitter exultation, he drooped his head upon Horatio's shoulder, and asked in the tone of a sick man for *some music—the recorders*. Thus he received Osric's message, with such a visible sinking of the heart, although bravely defying augury; and thus it was that he wept over the death of Polonius, after his great denunciation of his mother's vice. Hamlet's capacity for love he brought out by the tenderness of his friendship for Horatio, not less than by his profound

pity for Ophelia. I remember how, when some critic observed to James Spedding that Macready's vigorous frame told against him as a representative of Hamlet, this subtle thinker replied :

‘It may be so—it may be difficult to suppose that Macready would not have killed his uncle all at once; but on the other hand, an advantage attaches to him which I have observed in no other Hamlet: it is easy to credit him with the thoughts he utters.’

It is the fate of great actors generally, and it was especially Macready's, to infuse life into many dramas which cannot be sustained without the special actor. Amongst those exclusively associated with Macready may be counted Lord Byron's ‘Marino Faliero,’ ‘Sardanapalus,’ ‘Foscari,’ and ‘Werner;’ Talfourd's ‘Ion’ and ‘Glencoe;’ Sheridan Knowles's ‘Virginius’ and ‘William Tell;’ and Beaumont and

Fletcher's 'Maid's Tragedy,' adapted for the stage by Macready and Sheil, under the title of 'The Bridal.'

So little are they known now, that although 'Faliero' and the 'Foscari' have great things in them, and though 'The Bridal' is a tragedy of singular force, time would be lost in describing the master-strokes by which the tragedian won for them the sympathy of the public; and I must resolve to let go the noble frenzy of Virginius, the blighted old age of Faliero, the impetuous virtue of Melantius, and dwell only upon those Shakespearian characters which have everlasting life, and upon the few dramas brought out by the tragedian which still keep the stage.

One of the most prominent of Macready's Shakespearian impersonations was his Iago, which was great from the first line to the last. It was the conception of a fine intellect, and it was the performance

of a noble actor. He looked like the camp soldier, his bearing was frank and free, his speech suited with it; he was rough and straightforward in his ways; it was natural to think him honest; his countenance was open, he had a ready smile; he was manly; he wore a Mephistopheles feather in his cap (the cap was, indeed, copied from Retsch's famous etching in *Faust*), but the cap became him. The face that was so frank was also intellectual, and no one could be surprised that Othello listened to him.

Indeed, the audience watched him with unremitting attention: followed every glance of his eye—every movement—with always increasing interest. Yet he had not the fault which I have seen in many actors, and especially in Fechter, of seeking to engross observation by an over-elaborate by-play. No; he kept strictly to his place: he was quite



still while Othello addressed the Senate, as it was fit that he should be. Nor did he ever communicate his thoughts to the audience by a grimace; he trusted to his own intellect to mark the secret workings of the character, knowing that the spectators would follow him without the help of side-tricks.

The soliloquy in which he unveils to himself and his audience his plot and its motives was marvellous as an interpretation of character. He convinced his hearers that they need not cudgel their brains seeking for concealed causes of hatred against Othello, Cassio, or Desdemona. Iago's motive was found in his own nature; he contrived mischief with satanic ecstasy, he exulted in his sense of power when he planned an injury.

Does anyone doubt that such men and women exist? Let them read the records of great poisoning cases, in which the

power of inflicting torture, and of secretly undermining life, has been not unfrequently the sole, and often the chief, gratification. Nor will they fail to find almost daily, if they study the police reports, cases of persistent cruelty which have no other motive than this.

While Macready planned and plotted and weaved his web, we saw him gloat over the ignorance and the imagined pangs of his victims. He revelled as he felt himself the master of their passions, and knew that he could stealthily lead them on to their perdition.

The joy of contrivance, the exaltation of his intellectual superiority grew, as thought created thought, and rose to an almost sublime height when, contemplating his scheme, in all its parts he felt assured of its success.

The interest of this performance was so exciting, so absorbing, that Othello him-

self seemed less important. That would not have been the case if Kean had been his Othello ; the parts would then have been justly balanced, and in the preceding pages how the fire of that great tragedian vivified his own perceptions has been told in Macready's own words.

Iago's character was in every detail sustained perfectly throughout ; at the last his dogged aspect was passionate with his frustrated design, when, with his cap plunged over his brow, he burst the doors open with clenched fists to make his passage free.

In soldier-like characters Macready excelled : he had a martial commanding aspect. How admirably it became his Henry V. ! how gallant his bearing was ; how well he made his royalty felt, and how certain it seemed that such a chief must lead to conquest !

In his opening scene his indignant pro-

test against the insult of the Dauphin, with its combination of menace and irony, was not only so effectively spoken as to carry all hearers along with it, not only was moving by its passion and its scorn but also marked the individual character of the young King. There was frankness in his anger, there was heat in his sarcasms; his biting replies were not the expression of a malignant disposition, they were the outcome of a noble nature and of a just indignation. So that his :

‘For, God before,

We’ll chide this Dauphin at his father’s door,’

with its fine touch of religious reverence, seemed the natural close of such a scene.

In his detection of the conspiracy against him of his friend Scroop, he sounded that note of anguish which in him was irresistible; and afterwards, before the girded Harfleur, he rushed upon the scene with the rapidity of hot desire, and

with the grime of battle on his suit ; while before the walls he gave the well-known too-often-spoken declamation beginning ‘Ye men of Angiers,’ not as a carefully-weighed piece of elocution, but with swift utterance and hurried accents—hurried but not slurred. Not a single letter was missed or neglected, each had its due value ; and in the expression of the whole there was glowing fire, determined energy of will, and a magnificent lust of conquest.

The charming scene where the King disguised visits the camp, and hears old William’s complaints against himself, was played with true humour, and with the tenderness which Macready never missed. His soliloquy of ‘Oh, hard condition, twin-born of greatness,’ seemed to be thought out for the first time while he spoke it ; and all his heart, and all the deep music of his tones, were in the lines.

His wooing scene with Katharine of France was singularly agreeable. There was something of the rough camp-life in the bearing of the man which consorted well with the dialogue; but Macready knew how to blend with it a princely courtesy, and to convey to its free accents a pleading tone.

Perhaps, as a whole, Macready's representation of Henry V. will remain exclusively his own. If the character did not exhibit his powers in their fullest range, he filled the part completely, and missed not one of its attributes.

Macbeth may be mentioned in the next succession. In this character, as in Iago and Henry V., he was evidently a soldier, although with his rugged aspect and his untheatrical walk he did not (on his first entrance) fulfil the classical idea of a tragic hero or of a stage warrior. But when he spoke, when his countenance worked, and

when his gestures accompanied his words, the habit of command showed strongly in him, and on his face the lines of thought appeared; he had neither the roughness of the camp which marked his Iago, nor the open frankness of the princely Harry. He looked like one who had communed with himself among the mists of his native mountains with speculative thoughts; and it seemed no wonder that the agents of evil fixed upon him as a likely victim.

Macready's dealing with the first act of 'Macbeth' was one of his great triumphs, as it is one of Shakespeare's. It is truly an astonishing piece of work—astonishing because of its pre-eminent truth of feeling and character in the midst of improbabilities and impossibilities; a truth to which luxuriance of language has been sacrificed by the most prolific of writers. Macready was without gesticulation or

grimace, an amazed being with whom function was literally buried in surmise. His wandering, unsettled tone did more than all the efforts of those who played the witches in showing the supernatural at work. In a crowded theatre, Macready had a singular power of looking at nothing; and when he spoke 'into the air,' we could almost see the hags pass away, and like a wreath of vapour dissolve into the invisible element. Afterwards he was rapt; thick-coming fancies seemed to crowd through his brain—large thoughts, which left no room for lesser perceptions. Scarcely conscious of the presence of Banquo and his friends when once hailed Thane of Cawdor, his words to them dropped hurriedly and impatiently: it was the sublime of preoccupation.

The general characteristics of Macready's Macbeth have been so truly given in the 'Tour in England,' etc. (1832), of the



accomplished Prussian prince, Pückler Muskau, that I submit his description to the reader, rather than proceed any further with my own recollections. Of this same prince, Goethe has spoken as a man *with an acute, clear, comprehensive eye—a finely-constituted being, endowed with great capacity*. His account of Macready's Macbeth can have no better introduction than this. Let him now speak for himself :

‘I saw “Macbeth” performed this evening for the first time since I have been here. This is perhaps the finest of all Shakespeare's tragedies. Macready has returned from America, and played very finely indeed.

‘The situations in which he appeared the most powerful and natural were : first, in the night scene where he enters with the bloody dagger after Duncan's murder, and informs his wife that he has “done the deed.” The whole conversation was carried

on in a low tone, as the nature of the circumstances required—as a whisper in the dark ; and yet it was so distinct, so powerfully expressive, that every word of it—all the horrors of night and crime—penetrated into the very heart of the hearer.

‘Not less fine was the difficult passage with Banquo’s ghost :

“What man dare, I dare :

Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,  
The armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger,” etc.

He began the speech with all the energy of despair ; then, as if overcome with terror, his voice sank lower and lower, so that the last words were trembling and scarcely audible ; then with a cry of horror, covering his face with his mantle, he sank almost lifeless upon a seat. He produced here an astonishing effect. You shared with Macbeth the feeling that the most daring courage can bring nothing to

the encounter of the terrors of another world. You saw no trace of the actor, who, troubling himself little about nature, and only playing to please the galleries, seeks his triumph in "sound and fury."

'Macready was also admirable in the last act, where remorse and terror are both exhausted and rigid insensibility takes their place, where the last retribution falls upon the sinner in three rapidly succeeding strokes of fortune—the death of the Queen, the fulfilment of the witches' prophecy, and the terrible announcement of Macduff that he is "not born of woman." The combat with Macduff, where actors in general fail, was also masterly. There was nothing forced or hurried in it, but there was all the energy of terror, of rage, and despair.'

The late Lord Lytton has described Macready as 'a great metaphysical actor.' He did not intend to imply by this phrase

that he was only a metaphysical actor, but that he was distinctly so ; and this was eminently true. In his Duke of Gloucester ('Richard III.'), in his Richard II., in his King John, in his Brutus, this quality was of hardly less importance than in his Hamlet, his Macbeth, and his Lear. But in some of his most popular characters there was no room for his mental subtlety. His Rob Roy, his Claude Melnotte, and several of his comedy parts required nothing more than a direct, straightforward interpretation, and although they were certainly far from being his greatest performances, they were undoubtedly the most universally liked, being the easiest to understand. His Rob Roy was vigorous and commanding, with a good deal of impetus, and a racy Scotch pleasantry. He was very much the man drawn by Sir Walter Scott ; but the half-opera, half-play in which he appeared was so deplor-

able a medley that I have often wondered how it happened that he ever took part in it, yet always forgot to ask him that question. His Claude Melnotte, in the 'Lady of Lyons,' was one of his most successful representations. The author, Lord Lytton, with generous sympathy for Macready's efforts to regenerate the British stage, presented him with this piece as he did also with the comedy of 'Money.'

To those few who had read the 'Lady of Lyons' before it was acted, Macready's success in the character of Melnotte seemed doubtful. It was not in his line; the rhapsodical young peasant, insane with his amorous passion, could never have looked like Macready, could hardly have moved or spoken in his way, and accordingly in the earlier scenes there were shortcomings. He left the poet-peasant, breathing his vows of love to the blue heaven, often far behind him; the ethereal flame was de-

scribed but was not felt. While he acted the part of the Prince of Como to Pauline and her mother, trifling with a snuff-box and playing with a ring, his demeanour was stiff and serious, and when he replied to the contemptuous reproach of Damas ('The Prince of Como does not understand his own language'), the weight given to his trivial words made them appear absolutely ludicrous. For a moment he stood swelling indignantly in his blue uniform, and then gave his sentence : 'No, not as you speak it ; who the deuce could ?' with a force which might well have suited a great tragic denunciation ; indeed, as a bit of burlesque-tragedy it would have been perfection. Macready could be humorous but could not be light, and where an airy manner was required he was sure to fail. But while Melnotte poetized on the beauty of Italian gardens, lakes, and skies, he was in his element, and recovered his ascendancy ;

and when he reached the fourth and fifth acts he filled them with such a poetry of passion as carried his audience with him right on to the end. Many handkerchiefs fluttered, many eyes dropped tears, when Melnotte replied to Damas' exhortation to be a man : ' I am a man ; it is the sting of woe like mine which tells us we are men.' And a deeper passion was awakened when, with a burst of exultation, he snatched his bride from the arms of Beauséant with the words : ' Look up—look up, Pauline, for I can bear thine eyes,' etc. In the triumph of the last acts the faults of the opening scenes were obliterated, and the play had a complete success.

I may be forgiven if here I depart from the plan of my criticisms, which are intended to deal solely with Macready, to say how much of this success was due to the charm and power of Miss Helen Faucit's Pauline.

To the part of Evelyn in the comedy of 'Money,' Macready gave a distinction of manner and an elevation of character which lent a particular interest to the play; but of Lord Lytton's three popular dramas, that which owed most to the great actor's interpretation was undoubtedly 'Richelieu.' The character fitted him well; he had to make no effort to get into it, and from the beginning to the end there was not a single flaw. His dry satirical humour relieved by touches of tenderness to his ward Julie; his perfect assumption of the Cardinal's character, truly felt and as truly indicated, gave as much vitality to the earlier scenes as his great passion did to the later ones. He was Richelieu throughout, that singular commanding figure too well known to history; a great evil for France, a precious boon for her romance-writers. However true it is that the opening scenes were of great importance in developing



the character of the Cardinal, and that they were replete with interest, it is equally true that the concluding acts made the deepest impression, and gave the most signal example of Macready's particular gifts. None who heard could ever forget Richelieu's reply to the muttered observation of Baradas ('His mind and life are breaking fast') :

'Irreverent ribald !

If so, beware the falling ruins ! Hark !

I tell thee, scorner of these whitening hairs,

When this snow melteth there shall come a flood.'

The actor's passion rose to its noblest height as he stood looking down upon his foe, towering in his wrath ; and while he threatened the offender with the curse of Rome, his attitude assumed a dignity which was that of an immense power ; his voice then gave out peals of thunder. It was no wonder that his enemies shrank away in terror, and that he stood alone in

a charmed circle ; no wonder that this man should have held the destinies of Europe within his grasp.

Among the many romance-writers who dealt with the character of the great Cardinal, the most successful was the Count Alfred de Vigny, author of ‘Cinq Mars’ and ‘Stello,’ and he, visiting England at the time of the production of Bulwer’s ‘Richelieu,’ went to witness its representation. After seeing it, he addressed to Macready the following letter :

*Alfred de Vigny to William Charles  
Macready.*

‘Je ne puis vous dire dans mon billet, monsieur, combien je vous ai trouvé accompli dans le rôle difficile du Cardinal, où beaucoup de comédie fine et spirituelle se mêle aux scènes dramatiques. Si jamais on perdait en France le portrait du Cardinal de Richelieu, il faudrait passer

la mer et venir vous voir, car vous lui ressemblez autant que la nature l'a rendu possible. Vos gestes mêlés d'habitudes ecclésiastiques et d'infirmité et d'énergie étaient combinés parfaitement, et tout le rôle composé avec un art juste et profond.

‘ Le public de votre pays est comme le notre ; il aime trop l'action matérielle et il se refuse aux développements des caractères et des pensées. J'ai combattu ce mauvais penchant en France, parcequ'il amènerait la perte de l'art et des beautés durables. Je vous conseille bien de ne pas faire trop de sacrifices à ce goût et d'aider les auteurs à lutter contre la hâte de courir à l'événement ; j'ai remarqué que le public sait bon gré à ceux qui l'ont forcé d'entendre ce qui lui répugnait d'abord.

‘ Puisque vous m'assurez que je ne suis point indiscret en vous conduisant des admirateurs, je vous prie de me référer

pour le jour de cette semaine qui vous conviendra la même loge que j'avais. Je voudrais revoir plusieurs fois la même pièce ; le théâtre est à mes yeux une chose précieuse, et l'on ne peut vous voir trop souvent.'

Macready, to whom, as I have said, airy characters of the Mercutio type were impossible, was excellent in some comedy parts where the humour went deeper, and of which lightness was not the essence. His Benedick ('Much Ado About Nothing') was perfectly conceived, and on the whole very well executed. When John Kemble played the part, Benedick was distinguished by a graceful dignity of demeanour, with a sneering bitterness of manner. He smiled, he did not laugh ; his jest was satire. He was a courtier and a scoffer. If not Jaques, he was of his kindred. Macready's Benedick was a wholly

different creation, whose very essence was mirth. Life was a sport to him ; love a merry game. He was, from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet, all mirth. He had not a moment of gravity ; he laughed through the first scene and laughed away the last ; and this merriment, a little laboured at the beginning, a little too frequent in the first scene, and accompanied by action too restless and artificial, acquired ease as the play proceeded, and before long the actor was forgotten in the character. The opening scene once got over, his gaiety became natural, and his playfulness seemed to have been born with him. His bearing was soldierly, and his smile was the pleasantest thing in the world. I wish I could find a spell to bring back to its joyous life the scene of the masquerade, where the revelry was jocund, where the crowd was animated, where they laughed, and talked, and danced, met and parted,

assembled and dispersed without any apparent art, where the frolic seemed quite spontaneous. Still more, I wish that I could call up even for an hour the semblance of that gay reveller whose disguise seemed most to defy penetration, who most rejoiced in strange antics, who shook his mask first at one pretty face, then at another ; who at last attached himself to that scoffing beauty Beatrice, and who then was revealed to us as Benedick. His dialogue with her was very happy ; his feigned voice was a hoarse whisper—not a penny-trumpet squeak—a whisper which was full of expression when it questioned concerning Signor Benedick, ‘I pray you what is he?’ and which carried a most diverting threat in its words, ‘When I know the gentleman, I’ll tell him what you say.’

His subsequent comments on the dialogue were remarkably skilful, and the

perturbation with which he condemned Beatrice made an excellent preparation for his scene in the arbour—a scene which ought to be described in detail. He listened with a mixture of reluctance and gratification to the story of the love of Beatrice and advanced stealthily to the seat left vacant by Leonato, sinking into it with an air of rapt abstraction. His meditations on the probability of the case were accompanied by such uneasiness of action, such frequent changes of posture, and such unexpected pauses in his speech as well illustrated the perplexity of his mind; there was an evident struggle between the disposition to tenderness and the fear of ridicule; and when his soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of Beatrice, her careless speeches were interpreted into double meanings with a wealth of humour worthy of a great comedian.

In the fine scene of the wedding, where Hero's disaster brings forward the best part of Benedick's nature, Macready's tones and looks were tender and noble. He bent over the unhappy lady with a chivalrous solicitude; he followed all her movements with anxious care; he appeared worthy then of any woman's love, and it became a necessity that Beatrice should confess hers to him. His challenge to Claudio was in harmony with the preceding passages, and at the close of the comedy this Benedick had won the affection of all his hearers.

Macready's Jaques in 'As You Like It' was not altogether so successful. Here he was somewhat too sombre; he was rather a moody recluse than a weary courtier; and it seemed more probable that the Duke had lighted upon a severe moralist who had sought solitude in the forest, than that he had brought him there



as one of his court. Yet this fault being granted, there were still many suggestive and excellent passages, one of the most remarkable of which was his account of his meeting with the motley. He came on the scene laughing to himself, evidently much diverted with his thoughts; and the interjections of mirth with which he broke his reply to the Duke's observation, 'What! you look merrily!' had a due measure of bitterness in them; while during his pause between 'a motley fool——a miserable world,' the expression of his countenance gave to the passage its true significance, showing his contemptuous pity for humanity which could be so sharply satirized by the common jester.

To be sure, the meaning seems plain enough to ordinary sense, but the eighteenth-century commentators stumbled at it. Warburton endeavoured to make it

obscure, and Dr. Johnson in his reply went aside of the mark.

Macready gave to his quotations from Touchstone all their meaning with a skill which rejected the downright mimicry to which too many players resort, and the speech was concluded with a fresh burst of sarcastic merriment, which was in the true spirit of Jaques.

There was, however, only one character in comedy which Macready played throughout like a born comedian, in which he has perhaps never been equalled, and in which it appears impossible that he ever should be surpassed. This character is Mr. Oakley in 'The Jealous Wife.' He seemed the very man. There was no trace of our favourite tragedian in his presence. Without any apparent effort, he assumed the demeanour of a highly nervous man, morally timid. He appeared mortally afraid of his wife—he shrank from every

sound ; if a door opened, he looked frightened lest she should come through it. He had a perceptible tremor, but only just perceptible, at the sound of her voice. When she came on the scene, he had the manner and aspect of a very weak man. With anxious perturbation he submitted himself to her jealous catechism, only now and then betraying to the public his secret relish of the time he had passed out of her company. In his reply to her question concerning a lady with whom he had held a private interview, ‘ Was she handsome ? ’ the simple words, ‘ Oh, very handsome ! ’ were given with such delicious drollery, that the audience broke into a peal of laughter which interrupted the dialogue, for it took some time to subside. In that short sentence Macready conveyed his intense appreciation of feminine beauty, together with his terror of the conjugal wrath. He began in a tone of supreme

enjoyment—his countenance was beaming ; but under his wife's scrutinizing glance his whole aspect changed ; his voice sank—he was an image of abject terror. Afterwards, when his manly courage was called up, and he at last asserted himself as the master of his own house, he had all the force of the great tragic actor, if not his habitual manner.

It was a perfect performance throughout, and as such deserves a place side by side with his nobler impersonations. But it must always be remembered that tragedy demands the highest qualities in its representatives, and that to do great things greatly, though with some imperfections, is to deserve a larger measure of esteem than to execute even in absolute perfection an art which makes lesser claims upon the intellectual and emotional forces. In an eminent degree Macready possessed those attributes which rouse the best

faculties and stir the deepest sympathies of humanity.

Therefore it was that the great audience which was gathered together to listen to his last farewell at Drury Lane (February 26th, 1851) were moved to an unusual degree. They were parting with the guide to all that was most elevated in poetry; with the teacher of pure and high sentiment; with the passionate exponent of Shakespeare; with 'the opener of mysterious doors leading to universal knowledge;' with a friend who was a friend indeed. When he came on the stage after his performance of *Macbeth*, in his daily dress and alone, they bent eagerly forward. Their agitation was evident; but it was dominated by the desire to hear every syllable he uttered. He spoke, as suited the occasion, simply and briefly; his accents were tender, yet quite distinct. At the end his voice faltered, and tears, which

he quietly wiped away, fell from his eyes. The tears of his hearers flowed fast; and a voice from the gallery called out in lamentation, 'The last of the Mohicans!' Then arose a cheer loud and long, pausing for an instant, only to be renewed again and again with increasing power. Of the large numbers who failed to gain admittance, many were gathered outside the walls, and echoed the applause from within.

John Toole, the famous comedian, loves to tell how early that day he had to bestir himself to get a place, and how he stood one of a long queue outside of the pit entrance from two to six o'clock. Macready withdrew from the world in the height of his fame. He had many offers to return which were tempting, if money could have tempted him; and one solicitation more difficult to refuse—the solicitation of friendship. Charles Dickens, with

all his eloquence, urged him to give Shakespearian readings in London; but he replied, in the words of his Werner, 'I have done! I have done! I have done with life!'

THE END.









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